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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/22/2021
TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [SENV](#) [KS](#)
SUBJECT: ENVIRONMENTAL REMEDIATION OF USFK BASES -- ISSUE
FOR PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR SONG

Classified By: Amb. Alexander Vershbow. Reasons 1.4 (b,d).

11. (U) This is an action request.

12. (C) The return of closed U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) bases to the ROK has been delayed by an impasse over environmental remediation. The delay is slowing down progress on base relocation/consolidation, a centerpiece of the ongoing realignment of our military presence on the Peninsula. It is also causing USFK to expend hundreds of thousands of dollars a month to maintain security on the vacated bases. In an effort to accommodate ROK concerns and sensitivities, USFK proposed a compromise solution late last month. Despite earlier indications that the proposal would be accepted, the ROKG recently has asked the U.S. to consider "technical adjustments" to the U.S. proposal. In fact, however, the ROKG's "technical adjustments" would amount to a substantively different undertaking. We have made clear to the ROKG that the proposal could not be renegotiated and have urged the ROKG to settle the issue quickly. The Ambassador and USFK Commander General Bell on February 22 conveyed this message to Foreign Minister Ban Ki-moon and Blue House NSA Song Min-soon (septel), and DUSD Lawless did so with a ROK interagency delegation during the last round of Security Policy Initiative talks last week.

13. (C) Citing domestic political considerations including the upcoming May 31 local elections, NGO interest and interagency wrangling, our MOFAT and Blue House interlocutors have indicated that the ROKG will need more time to work the issue. However, we believe it is important to at least reach an agreement in principle on the latest U.S. proposal, deferring public announcements and technical discussions to a later point if/as necessary. Presidential Secretary Song Min-soon, who plays a critical role on this issue, will be in Washington February 23-24 for meetings with NSA Hadley and other senior officials. We recommend NSA Hadley and others reinforce our message to Song, drawing on the following talking points:

-- Extremely concerned about the impasse over environmental remediation of closed USFK bases. The impasse is delaying our return of valuable land to the Korean people. It is also slowing progress on our base relocation and consolidation, a core element of the major realignment effort initiated under the Future of the Alliance Initiative. Need to settle the issue quickly.

-- As Ambassador Vershbow and General Bell made clear to you earlier this week, the last U.S. proposal represents a

good-faith effort by the U.S. to accommodate ROK concerns and goes well beyond requirements under the SOFA. It is our best and final offer. We urge the ROKG to accept the proposal.

-- We have to find a way forward quickly. If important considerations require you to delay public announcement or detailed technical discussions until later, we should at least reach an agreement in principle on our proposal now so that we can remove this difficult issue from our list of problems.

14. (U) This message has been coordinated with USFK.
VERSHBOW